

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
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AL GRIGIS

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MICRONESIA: THE REFERENDUM FOR FEDERATION

ANNCR:

EARLIER THIS WEEK, THE PEOPLE OF MICRONESIA VOTED ON A CONSTITUTION THAT CAN GIVE THEM PARTIAL INDEPENDENCE AFTER 31 YEARS UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNITED STATES.

VOA'S AL GRIGIS HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

KNOWN AS THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS, THE TWO THOUSAND OR SO ISLANDS OF MICRONESIA LIE SCATTERED EAST OF THE PHILIPPINES IN AN AREA THE SIZE OF THE UNITED STATES. ONLY 96 OF THE ISLANDS ARE POPULATED AND ON THEM LIVE 110 THOUSAND PEOPLE WHO ARE DIVIDED LINGUISTICALLY AND ETHNICALLY.

MICRONESIA IS ALSO THE LAST OF THE 11 TRUST TERRITORIES ESTABLISHED BY THE UNITED NATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR TWO. ALL THE OTHERS HAVE VOTED THEMSELVES EITHER INDEPENDENCE OR ASSOCIATION WITH SOME OTHER COUNTRY.

MICRONESIA CAME UNDER UNITED STATES MILITARY CONTROL DURING THAT WAR AND WAS LATER DESIGNATED AS A STRATEGIC TRUST OF THE UNITED NATIONS, WITH THE UNITED STATES GRANTED SOLE ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY AS THE AGENT OF THE UNITED NATION.

COMPOSED OF THREE MAJOR GROUPS -- THE MARIANAS, CAROLINES AND MARSHALLS -- THE ISLANDS WERE OFFERED COMMONWEALTH STATUS BY THE UNITED STATES IN 1970. HOWEVER, THE CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA TURNED DOWN THE OFFER THE FOLLOWING YEAR. IN 1975, THE NORTHERN GROUP, THE MARIANAS, VOTED TO SEVER ITS TIES WITH MICRONESIA AND MERGE WITH THE UNITED STATES AS A COMMONWEALTH WHEN THE TRUSTEESHIP ENDS, PROBABLY IN 1981. WITH THAT STATUS, THE 15 THOUSAND ISLANDERS OF THE MARIANAS,

LIKE THE INHABITANTS OF PUERTO RICO AND GUAM, WILL BE U.S. CITIZENS WITH MOST OF THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF OTHER AMERICANS EXCEPT FOR VOTING REPRESENTATION IN THE UNITED STATES OR DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

IT IS POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, FOR THE REST OF MICRONESIA TO BECOME INDEPENDENT WHEN THE UNITED NATIONS TRUSTEESHIP ENDS. AND ON WEDNESDAY (AUGUST 12), IN A REFERENDUM WHICH COULD BE DECIDED BY A FEW THOUSAND BALLOTS, 60 THOUSAND ELIGIBLE VOTERS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPROVE OR REJECT A CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD CREATE A NEW FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA.. THE PROPOSED FEDERATION IS THE RESULT OF NINE YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN MICRONESIAN AND AMERICAN OFFICIALS. THE NEW FEDERATION WOULD GOVERN ITS OWN INTERNAL AFFAIRS BUT SHARE CONTROL OVER FOREIGN POLICY WITH THE UNITED STATES. THE UNITED STATES WOULD ALSO RETAIN DEFENSE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANOTHER FIFTEEN YEARS.

THE ISLANDS ARE DIVIDED INTO SIX VOTING DISTRICTS, AND AT LEAST FOUR MUST APPROVE THE CONSTITUTION IF THE FEDERATION IS TO BE BORN. IF LESS THAN FOUR VOTE FOR FEDERATION, THE UNITED STATES TRUSTEESHIP WILL CONTINUE UNTIL SOME NEW ARRANGEMENT IS NEGOTIATED.

IN ANY CASE, BECAUSE OF THE VAST DISTANCES BETWEEN THE ISLANDS, THE RESULTS MAY NOT BE KNOWN FOR ANOTHER TWO WEEKS, AFTER ALL THE BALLOT BOXES ARE COLLECTED FROM THE MORE REMOTE ISLANDS BY BOAT AND AIRPLANE.

JS/PY